

SOWN AMONG THORNS NO. 2040

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, AUGUST 19, 1888,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them.”
Matthew 13:7.

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hears the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”
Matthew 13:22.

WHEN that which comes of his sowing is unfruitful, the sower's work is wasted; he has spent his strength for nothing. Without fruit the sower's work would even seem to be insane, for he takes good wheat, throws it away, and loses it in the ground. Preaching is the idlest of occupations if the word is not adapted to enter the heart, and produce good results. O my hearers, if you are not converted, I waste time and energy in standing here! Men might well think it madness that one whole day in the week should be given up to hearing speeches; madness, indeed, it would be if nothing came of it to conscience and heart. If you do not bring forth fruit to holiness, and the end is not everlasting life, I should be better employed in breaking stones on the roadside than in preaching to you.

Fruit bearing made the difference appear in the various soils upon which the sower scattered seed. You would not so certainly have known the quality if you had not seen the failure or success of the seed. We do not know your hearts until we see your bearing towards the gospel. If it produces in you holiness and love to God and man, then we know that there is good soil in you, but if you are merely promising people, but not performing people, then we know that the ground of your heart is hard, or stony, or thorny. The word of the Lord tries the hearts and reins of the children of men, and in this it is as the fire which distinguishes between metal and dross. O my dear hearers, you undergo a test today! Perhaps you will be judging the preacher, but a greater than the preacher will be judging you, for the Word itself shall judge you. You sit here as a jury upon yourselves; your own condition will be brought clearly out by the way in which you receive or refuse the gospel of God. If you bring forth fruit to the praise of God's grace, well, but if not, however you may seem to hear with attention, and may retain what you hear in your memories, if no saving effect is produced upon your souls, we shall know that the soil of your heart has not been prepared of the Lord, and remains in its native barrenness.

What fruit have you borne until now from all your hearing? May I venture to put the question to each one of you very pointedly? Some of you have been hearers from your childhood—are you any the better? What long lists of sermons you must have heard by now! Count over your Sundays; how many they have been! Think of the good men now in heaven, to whom you once listened! Remember the tears that were drawn from you by their discourses! If you are not saved yet, will you ever be saved? If you are not holy yet, will you ever be holy? Why has the Lord spent so much on one who makes no return? To what purpose is this waste? Surely you will have much to answer for in that great day when the servants of God shall give their accounts, and shall have no joy when they come to mention you. How will you excuse yourselves before God for having occasioned them so much disappointment?

At this time I will only deal with one class of you. I will not speak to those of you who hear the word, and retain none of it because of the hardness of your hearts; such are the wayside hearers. Neither will I address myself to those who receive the truth with sudden enthusiasm, and as readily quit it when trial befalls them; such are the rocky-ground hearers. But I will deal with those of you who hear the Word attentively, and, in a sense, receive it into your hearts and understandings, so that the seed grows in you, though its fruit never comes to perfection. You are religious persons, and to all appearance you are under the influence of godliness. You exhibit plenty of leaf, but there is no corn in the ear, no sub-

stance in your Christianity. I cannot speak with any degree of physical vigor to you, by reason of the infirmity under which I struggle, but what I do say to you is steeped in earnest desire that the Lord may bless it to you. An eloquent congregation will make any preacher eloquent; help me, then, this morning. If you will give me your ear, you will make up for my deficiency of tongue, especially if you give to God your hearts, He will bless His truth, however feebly I may utter it.

First, I desire to talk to you a little about *the seed* which you have received; secondly about *the thorns*; thirdly about *the result*.

I. First a little about THE SEED. Remember, first, that *it was the same seed in every case*. Yonder it has brought forth thirty-fold, it was the same seed which was lost upon you. In a still better case, the seed has brought forth a hundred-fold; it was precisely the same corn with which your field has been sown. The sower went to his Master's granary for all his seed; how is it that in your case it is all lost? If there were two gospels, we might expect two results without fault in the soil which failed. But with many of you to whom I speak there has been only one gospel throughout the whole of your lives. You have been attending in this house of prayer, where we have never changed our seed, but have gone on sowing the one eternal truth of God. Many have brought forth fruit a hundred-fold from the seed which has been scattered broadcast from this platform. They heard no more than you have heard, but how much better they treated it than you have done! I want you to consider this. How covered with briars and thorns must your mind be that the gospel which converted your sister or friend never touched you! Though you may be nominally a believer in the Word of God, it has never so affected you as to make you gracious and holy. You are still a hearer only. How is this? The fault is not in the seed, for it is the same which has been so useful to others.

You have heard the gospel with *pleasure*. "Heard it!" you say, "I heard it when a little child." Your mother brought you to the house of God in her arms. You have heard it, and still hear it, though it is rather like an old song to you, but is this to be all? I am very grateful that you do hear the gospel, for I hope that one of these days God may cause it to grow in you, and yield fruit. But still a grave responsibility is upon you. Think how favored you have been! How will you answer for this privilege if it is neglected and rendered useless by that neglect? Dear hearers, if we lived in the heart of Africa, and we died without believing in a Christ of whom we had not heard, we could not be blamed for that, but here we are in the heart of London, where the gospel is preached in all our streets, and our blood will be on our own heads if we perish. Do you mean to go down to hell? Are you so desperate that you will go there wearing the garb of Christians? If you do persist ruining your souls, my eyes shall follow you with tears, and when I cannot warn you any longer, I will weep in secret places because of your perversity.

Those described in my text were not only hearers, but in a measure *they accepted the good Word*. The seed fell not only on this ground, but into it, so that it began to grow. Of you it is true that you do not refuse the gospel, or raise disputes concerning it. I am glad that you have no difficulties about the inspiration of Scripture, or the Deity of our Lord, or the fact of His atonement. You do not befog yourselves with "modern thought," but you avow your belief in the old, old gospel. So far, so good; but what shall I make of the strange fact that your acceptance of the truth has no effect upon you? It is a very lamentable case, is it not, that a man should believe the gospel to be true, and yet shall live as if it were a lie? If it is the truth, why do you not yield obedience to it? The person knows that there is an atonement for sin, but he has never confessed his sin, and accepted the great sacrifice. Those great truths, which circle about the cross like a coronet of stars, he has seen their beauty and enjoyed their brilliance, but he has never allowed their light to enter his heart, and find a reflection in his moral character. This is evil, only evil. If you believe the truth, what do you more than the devil? No, you are behind him, for he believes, *and trembles* and you have not gone so far as the trembling. It should be so, that every great truth which is believed should influence the mind, sway the thoughts, and mold the life; this is the natural fruitage of great spiritual truth. The doctrine of grace, when it takes possession of the mind, and governs the heart, produces the purest results, but if it is held in unrighteousness, it is a curse rather than a blessing to have a head-knowledge. Is it not a dreadful thing to believe God's revelation without receiving God's Spirit? This is to accept a well, but never to drink of the water; accept corn in the barn, and yet die of hunger. God have mercy upon the possessors of a dead faith!

The seed, sown among thorns, *lived and continued to grow*. And in many men's minds the gospel of divine truth is growing after a fashion, they understand it better, can defend it more valorously, and speak of it more fluently. Moreover, it does influence them in some form and degree, for, gross vices are forsaken. They are decent imitations of believers; you can see the shape of an ear, the stalk has struggled up through the thorns until you can see its head, and are led to expect corn. But go to that apparent corn-ear, and feel it; there are the sheaths, but there is nothing in them; you have all the makings of an ear of corn, but it will yield no grain. I would speak to those before me who, perhaps, have been baptized, and are members of the church; I want to ask of them a question or two. Do you not think that there is a great deal of empty profession nowadays? Do you not think that many have a name to live and are dead? "Yes," you say, "I know a neighbor whom I judge to be in that condition." May not another neighbor judge the same of you? Would it not be well to raise the question about yourself? Have you really believed in the Lord Jesus? Are you truly converted from sin and self? Turn that sharp eye of yours homeward for a while. Examine your own actions, and judge your condition by them. Put yourself into the crucible. O my God, what if I should be a preacher to others, and should be myself a castaway! Will not every deacon and elder, and every individual church member, speak to himself after the same fashion. You will go to your Sunday school class this afternoon; will you be teaching the children what you do not know? You mean to go to a meeting this evening, and talk to others about conversion; will you be exhorting them to that which you have never yourself experienced? Will it be so? You do not need fine preaching, but you do need probing in the conscience. A thorough examination will do the healthy no harm, and it may bless the sick. "Lord, let me know the worst of my case," is one of my frequent prayers, and I suggest it to you.

So much then about the seed; it was good seed, it was sown, it was received by the soil, it grew and promised well, but yet in the end it was unfruitful. No doubt multitudes, who receive Christianity, become regular attendants at our place of worship, and are honest in their moral character, but Christ is not all in all to them, He holds a very secondary place in their affections. Their wheat is overshadowed with a thicket of thorns, and is so choked that it comes to nothing. Their religion is buried beneath their worldliness. Sad will their end be. God in mercy save us from such a doom!

II. But now, secondly, I would speak a little about THE THORNS. They are by Matthew described as "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches." Luke adds, "and pleasures of this life," and Mark still further mentions, "the lusts of other things." I suppose that the sower did not see any thorns when he threw the handful of corn; they had all been cut down level with the surface. He probably hoped that it was all good ground, and therefore he sowed it, little suspecting that the thorns were in possession.

Note well that *thorns are natural to the soil*. Since the fall these are the first-born children of the ground. Any evil which hinders religion is not at all an extraordinary thing—it is what we ought to expect among fallen human beings. Grace is an exotic; thorns are indigenous. Sin is very much at home in the human heart, and, like an ill weed, it grows quickly. If you wish to go to heaven, I might take a little time to show you the way, and I would need to stir you up to diligence, but if you must necessarily go to hell—well, "easy is the way to destruction"—it is only a little matter of neglect. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Evil things are easy things, for they are natural to our fallen nature. Right things are rare flowers that need cultivation. If any of you are being injured by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, I am not astonished; it is natural that it should be so. Therefore, be on your guard against these mischiefs. I pray you say to yourself, "Come, there is something in this man's talk. He is very slow and dull, but still there is something in what he says. I may, after all, be tolerating those thorns in my heart which will kill the good seed, for I am of like passions and infirmities with other men." I beseech you look to yourselves, that you be not deceived at the last.

The thorns were already established in the soil. They were not only the natural inhabitants of the soil, but they were rooted and fixed in it. Our sins within us claim the estate of our faculties, and they will not give it up if they can help it. They will not give way to the Holy Spirit, or to the new life, or to the influences of divine grace, without a desperate struggle. The roots of sin run through and through our nature, grasp it with wonderful force, and keep up their grasp with marvelous tenacity. O my dear hearer, whoever you may be, you are a fallen creature! If you were the Pope himself, or the President of the

United States, or the Queen of England, it would be true of you that you were born in sin, and shapen in iniquity, and your unregenerate heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. The established church of the town of Mansoul has the devil for its archbishop. Sin has enclosed our nature as a boa constrictor encircles its victim, and when it has maintained its hold for twenty, forty, or sixty years, I hope you are not so foolish as to think that holy things will easily get the mastery. Our evil nature is radically conservative, and it will endeavor to crush out every attempt at a revolution by which the grace of God should reign through righteousness. Therefore, watch and pray, lest temptation choke that which is good in you. Watch earnestly, for grace is a tender plant in a foreign soil, in an uncongenial clime; while sin is in its own element, and is strongly rooted in the soil.

Do you know why so many professing Christians are like the thorny ground? It is because processes have been omitted which would have gone far to alter the condition of things. It was the husbandman's business to uproot the thorns, or burn them on the spot. Years ago when people were converted, there used to be such a thing as conviction of sin. The great subsoil plow of soul-anguish was used to tear deep into the soul. Fire also burned in the mind with exceeding heat, as men saw sin, and felt its dreadful results the love of it was burned out of them. But now we are dinned with bragging about rapid salvation. As for myself, I believe in instantaneous conversions, and I am glad to see them, but I am still gladder when I see a thorough work of grace, a deep sense of sin, and an effectual wounding by the law. We shall never get rid of thorns with plows that scratch the surface. Those fields grow the best corn, which are best plowed. Converts are likely to endure when the thorns cannot spring up because they have been plowed up. Dear hearer, are you undergoing today a very severe conviction of sin? Thank God for it. Are you in awful trouble and anguish? Do not think that a calamity has happened to you. May God Himself continue to plow you, and then sow you, and make sure work in you for years to come! So you see these thorns were natives, and old-established natives, and it would have been well had they been cut up.

The thorns were bound to grow. There is an awful vitality in evil. First the thorns sent up a few tiny shoots. These shoots branched out, and more and more came to keep them company, till the corn stood as a lonely thing in a thicket of briars, and were more and more overtapped and shadowed by them. The thorns aspired to the mastery, and they soon obtained it; that done, they set to work to destroy the corn. They blocked it up, crowded it out, and some of the thorn shoots twisted around it, and held the corn by the neck until it was choked.

The thorns sucked away all the nutriment from the grain, and it was starved, for there is only a certain quantity of nourishment in the soil, and if the thorns have it, the corn must go without it. There is only a certain amount of thought and energy in a man, and if the world gets it, Christ cannot have it. If our thoughts run upon care and pleasure, they cannot be eager about true religion; is not that clear? That is the way in which those thorns served the grain; they starved it by devouring its food, and they choked it by keeping off the air and sun, and the poor thing became shriveled and weak, and quite unable to produce the grain which the sower expected of it. So it is with many professing Christians. They are at first worldly, but not so very worldly. They are fairly religious, though by no means too zealous. They seek the pleasures of the world, but by no means quite so much as others we could name. But very soon the thorns grow, and it becomes doubtful, which will win, sin or grace, the world or Christ. Two masters there cannot be, and in this case it is especially impossible, since neither of the contending powers will brook a rival. Sin has sprung from a royal, though evil stock, and if it is in the heart, it will struggle for the throne. So it came to pass that the tares, being tolerated, choked the good seed.

Let me describe these thorns a little. Putting together Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find that there were four sorts of thorns. The first is called "*the care of this world.*" This assuredly comes to the poor; they are apt to grow anxious and mistrustful about temporal things. "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? With what shall we be clothed?" This trinity of doleful questions afflicts many. But anxiety comes to rich people also. Care dwells with wealth as well as with poverty. "How shall I get more? How shall I lay it up? How shall I still increase it?"—and so on. It is "*the care of the age*" which we are most warned against. Each age has its own special fret. It is not a care for God—that is not the care of any age, but the care of the age is some vanity or another, and as a standing thing it is the ambition to keep up with your fellows, to be respectable, and to keep up appearances. This is the care which eats as does a

canker in the case of many. Grim care turns many a black hair white, and furrows many a brow. If you let care grow in your soul, it will choke up your religion; you cannot care for God and for mammon too. "We must have care," says one. There is a care which is proper, and there is an anxiety which is improper. That is proper care which you can cast upon God—"Casting all your care upon Him; for He cares for you." That is an improper care which you dare not take to God, but have to bear yourself. Take heed of anxiety; it will eat the heart out of your religion.

There were others who felt "*the deceitfulness of riches.*" Our Lord does not say "riches," but "the deceitfulness of riches." The two things grow together; riches are evermore deceitful. They deceive people in the getting of them, for people judge matters very unfairly when a prospect of gain is before them. The jingle of the charming guinea, or of "the almighty dollar," makes a world of difference to the ear when it is hearing a case. Men cannot afford to lose by integrity, and so they take the doubtful way, and either sail near the wind, or speculate until it amounts to gambling. They would not endure the idea of such conduct, were it not that the hope of gain deceives them. Our line of conduct ought never to be ruled by gain or loss. Do right if the heavens fall. Do no wrong, even though a kingdom should be its reward. Men turn to Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations," a wonderful book, and there they find certain laws which I believe to be as fixed and unalterable as the laws of gravitation; led on by the deceitfulness of riches, men make these laws into an excuse for grinding the faces of the poor. They might as well take people to the top of a rock, fling them down, and dash them to pieces, and then cry out, "This is the natural result of the law of gravitation." Of course, the law of gravitation operates remorselessly, and so will the law of supply and demand, but we must not use either of these laws as a cover for cruelty to the poor and needy, yet many do so through "the deceitfulness of riches."

Riches are very deceitful when they are gained, for they breed in men many vices which they do not themselves suspect. One man is purse-proud, but he thinks he is humble. He is a self-made man, and worships him that made him. Is it not natural that a person should worship his maker? In his heart he thinks, "I am somebody. I came up to London with half-a-crown in my pocket, and now I could buy a whole street!" People ought to respect a man of that kind, ought they not, even though he may have made his money by very strange practices? It little matters how you make money nowadays; only get it, and you will have plenty of admirers, and the deceitfulness of riches will enable you to admire yourself. With pride comes a desire for wealthy society and vain company, and thus again religion receives severe injury. There is apt to grow up in the mind an idolatry of this world and its treasures. "I don't love money," says one. "You know it is not money that is the root of all evil, but the love of it." Just so, but are you sure that you do not love it? Your thoughts run a good deal after it. You hug it rather closely, and you find it hard to part with it. I will not accuse you, but I would have you awake to the fact that riches worm themselves into a person's heart before he is well aware of it.

You may perceive the deceitfulness of riches if you note the excuses which people make for getting so much and withholding it from the cause of God. "They intend to do a great deal of good with it." Did you hear the devil laugh? I am not speaking of many dear brethren in this place who are doing a great deal of good with their means, but I am speaking of those who are simply living to accumulate wealth, and say that they will one day do a great deal of good with it. They say so. Will it ever be more than saying? I fear that in this thing many rich people deceive themselves. They go on accumulating the means, but never using them; making bricks, but never building. All they will get with it will be a corner in "The Illustrated London News" to say that they died worth so much. O sirs, how can you be content thus to have your good things choked? Wherever this deceitfulness of riches is allowed the upper hand, it chokes the good seed. A person cannot be eager to get, and eager to keep, and eager to increase, and eager to become a millionaire, and at the same time be a true servant of the Lord Jesus. As the body grows rich, the soul grows poor.

Luke tells us of another kind of weed, namely, "*the pleasures of this life.*" I am sure that these thorns play a dreadful part nowadays. I have nothing to say against recreation in its proper place. Certain forms of recreation are needful and useful, but it is a wretched thing when amusement becomes a vocation. Amusement should be used to do us good "like a medicine," it must never be used as the food of the man. From early morning until late at night some spend their time in a round of frivolities, or else their very work is simply carried on to furnish them funds for their pleasures. This is vicious. Many have

had all holy thoughts and gracious resolutions stamped out by perpetual trifling. Pleasure so called is the murderer of thought. This is the age of excessive amusement; everybody craves for it, like a babe for its rattle. In the more sober years of our fathers, men had something better to live for than silly sports. The thorns are choking the age.

Mark adds, "*And the lusts of other things.*" I will not enumerate all those other things, but all things except the things of Christ and of the Father are "other things." If anybody spends his life on any object, however good, short of the glory of God, the good seed is choked by the inferior object. One person is eminently scientific, and he will do well if his science is used for holy purposes, but it can be used to choke the seed. One man is a great proficient in the arts, and he does well if the arts are used as a mule for Christ to ride upon, but if art is to ride upon Christ, then it is ill enough. I met with a clergyman many years ago who was going a long distance to find a new beetle. He was a great entomologist, and I did not blame him for it, for to a thoughtful man entomology may yield many profitable lessons. But if he neglected his preaching to catch insects, then I do not wonder that a parishioner would wish that the beetles would nibble his old sermons, for they were very stale. I call it choking the seed when any inferior pursuit becomes the master of our minds, and the cause of God and truth takes a secondary place. The seed is choked in our souls whenever Christ is not our all in all. You see my drift; be it what it may—gain, glory, study, pleasure—all these may be briars that will choke the seed.

Mr. Jay was never more pleased than when at Bristol he had a note sent up to him which ran as follows—"A young man, who is prospering in business, begs the prayers of God's people that prosperity may not be a snare to him." Take care that you look thus upon your prosperity. My dear friend Dr. Taylor, of New York, speaks of some Christians nowadays as having a "butterfly Christianity." When time, and strength, and thought, and talent are all spent upon mere amusement, what else are men and women but mere butterflies? "Society" is just a mass of idle people, keeping each other in countenance. O dear hearers, surely we did not come into this world to play away our days! I do not think we came into this world either to slave ourselves to death, or to rust away in laziness. We have come here as a man enters into the porch that he may afterward enter the house. This life is the doorway to the palace of heaven. Pass through it in such style that you may enter before the King with holy joy. If you give your mind and thoughts to these passing things, be they what they may, you will ruin your souls, for the good seed cannot grow.

III. So I close in the last place by noticing THE RESULT. The seed was unfruitful.

These briars and thorns could not pull the seed up, or throw it away; it remained where it was, but they choked it. So it may be that your business, your cares, your pleasures, have not torn up your religion by the roots—it is there still, such as it is. But these things suffocate your better feelings. A man that is choked is not good for much. If a thief gets into his house, and he desires to defend his property, what can he do while he is choked? He must wait until he gets his breath again. What an amount of choked religion we have around us! It may be alive; I do not know whether it is or not, but it looks very black in the face. God save you from having your religion choked!

I have already told you it was drained of all its sustenance. Look at many Christians; I call them Christians, for they call themselves so. A boy in the streets, selling mince pies kept crying, "Hot mince pies!" A person bought one of them, and found it quite cold. "Boy," said he, "why did you call these pies hot?" "That's the name they go by, sir," said the boy. So there are plenty of people that are called Christians, but they are not Christians—that's the name they go by, but all the substance is drained out of them by other matters. You see the shape of a Christian, the make of a Christian, and some of the talk of a Christian, but the fruit of a Christian is not there. That is the result of the choking by the thorns of care, riches, pleasure, and worldliness in general.

What life there was in the grain was very sickly. Let me remind certain persons that their spiritual lives are growing weak at this time. Morning prayer this morning, how long did it take? Do not grow red in the face. I will say no more about it. You are not coming out tonight, are you? Half a Sunday is enough worship for you. Would you not like to live in some country place, where you did not need to go out to a place of worship even once? Bible reading, how much do you do of that? Family prayer, is that a delight to you? Why, numbers of so-called Christians have given up family religion altogether. How about weekday services? You are not often at a prayer meeting. No, the distance is too great! Thursday

night service? "Well, well, you see I might come, but there happens to be a lawn tennis party that night." Will you come in the winter? "Yes, I would, but then a friend drops in, and we have an evening at bagatelle." How many there are in this condition! I am not going to judge them, but I remember that an eminent minister used to say, "When weekday services are forsaken, farewell to the life of godliness." Such people never seem to bathe in their religion, but they give themselves a wetting with the end of the towel; they try to look decent, but they are not inwardly cleansed.

As to confessing Christ before men, many fail altogether. If you were pushed into a corner, and were asked if you are a Christian, you would say, "Well, I do go to a place of worship," but you are by no means anxious to own the soft impeachment. Our Salvation Army friends are not ashamed of their religion; why should you be? Our Quaker friends used to wear broad brims, but they are very properly giving up their peculiar garb; I hope it is not to be to you an indication that you may conceal your religion, and be as much as possible like the world. Do you hope to be soldiers, and yet never wear your regiments? This is one of the marks of feeble religion.

When it comes to defending the gospel, where do you see it in this age? I hoped that many would be found among Baptists who would care for the truth, but now I come to the conclusion that it is with many, as with the showman, when asked which was Wellington, and which was Bonaparte, "Whichever you please, my little dears. Pay your money, and take your choice!" Free will or free grace, human merit or Christ's atonement, it does not matter now. New theology or old theology, human speculation or divine revelation—who minds? What do they care whether God's truth stands or the devil's lies? I am weary of these drivellers! The thorns have choked the seed in the pulpits and in the churches as well as in private individuals. Oh, that God would return! Oh, that His Spirit would raise up among us men who believe indeed, and prove the power of their belief!

The fruit of much modern piety is *nil*. I sat down one day with three or four old Christian men. We had no sooner met than we began to speak of the providential dealings of God with His people; we related instances of answers to prayer, and we spoke of the sovereign grace of God, and His faithfulness to His saints. When we had gone a little forward in the conversation, one remarked how he had enjoyed the talk. "Alas!" said he, "nobody talks about God now; His providence and His readiness to hear prayer are seldom mentioned now. The talk is all about the markets, and the weather, and Home Rule, and Mr. Gladstone, and Disestablishment, but little enough about the Lord Jesus Christ." That witness was true. In old times the Lord's people spoke often one to another and the Lord stood at the window and listened—"The Lord hearkened, and heard it." He liked their talk so well, that He said He would print it—"A book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name" Where do you get experiential Christian talk now? The thorns choke holy communion upon the best things.

Fervent prayer! Mighty prayer! Where do you meet with it? Thank God, we have some brethren here whose prayers could unlock the windows of heaven, or shut them up, but it is not so with many. Go to the prayer meetings of most of the churches. What poor things! Of course I find in country places that many drop the prayer meeting during hay time and harvest. In London they do not drop the prayer meetings in summer, because they are too small to need dropping; they take up the fragment of a prayer meeting and mend with it the worn-out lecture, so that it becomes neither lecture nor prayer meeting. How can we expect a blessing when we are too lazy to ask for it? Is it not evidence of a dying religion when, to cover their carelessness about meeting for prayer, we even hear ministers doubting the value of prayer meetings, and calling them "religious expedients"?

Where do you meet with intense enjoyment of the things of God? The spiritual life is low when there is little delight in holy service. Oh, for the old Methodist fire! Oh, to feel our hearts dance at the sound of Jesus' name! Oh, to flame up like beacon fires, and blaze toward heaven with holy ecstasy! It is a sorrowful day when religion goes abroad without wearing her ornaments of joy. When an army has left its flag behind, it has evidently given up all idea of victory.

If there is a declension in spiritual life, we cannot expect to see deeds of holy consecration. Oh, for men and women who bring their alabaster boxes to Jesus! I am glad when I hear this kind of lamentation. "My dear sir, I have not done for the Lord what I ought to have done. I have been a believer now for many years, but I have not given to His cause what I ought to have given; tell me what I can do."

There are hopeful signs in such inquiries, and therefore they are well, but it would be better to begin early, and avoid such regrets.

I would put it to you, my dear hearer, have you been fruitful? Have you been fruitful with your wealth? Have you been fruitful with your talent? Have you been fruitful with your time? What are you doing for Jesus now? Salvation is not by doings, you are saved by grace, but if you are so saved, prove it by your devoted life. Consecrate yourself anew this day wholly to your Master's service. You are not your own, but bought with a price, and if you would not be like these thorn-choked seeds, live while you live, with all-consuming zeal.

"Well," says one, "but there are the thorns." I know there are; they were here when our blessed Lord came among us, and they made Him a cruel crown. Are you going to grow more of them? May I urge you to give up cultivating thorns? They are useless; they come to no good. Whatever the pursuit is, short of the glory of God, it is a thorn, and there is no use in it. It will in the end be painful to you as it was to your Lord. A thorn will tear your flesh, yes, tear your heart. Especially when you come to die will these thorns be in your pillow. Even if you die in the Lord, it will grieve your heart to think you did not live more to Jesus. If you live for these things, you will rue the day, for they are like thorns, painful in the getting, painful in the keeping, and painful in the extraction. You who have had a thorn in your hand know what I mean. Worldly cares come with pain, they stay with pain, and they go with pain.

Still, there is a use for thorns. What is that use? First, if you have thorns about you today, make a child's use of them. What does a child do? If he gets a thorn in his finger, he looks at it, and cries. How it smarts! Then he runs off to his mother. That is one of the sweet uses of his adversity, it admits him to his mother at once. She might say, "What are you coming in for? Run about the garden." But he cries, "Please, mother, I've got a thorn in my finger." This is quite enough argument to secure him the best attention of the queen of the house. See how tenderly she takes out the little dagger! Let your cares drive you to God. I shall not mind if you have many of them if each one leads you to prayer. If every fret makes you lean more on the Beloved, it will be a benefit. Thus make good use of the thorns.

Another service to which thorns may be put is to make a hedge of them, to keep the goats of worldly pleasure from eating the young shoots of your graces. Let the sorrows of life keep off temptations which else might do you serious mischief.

May we meet in heaven! Oh, may we all meet in heaven! What a congregation I have addressed this morning! I feel overawed as I look at you. From the ends of the earth have many of you come. The Lord bless you! Strangers are here in vast numbers, for the most of our regular hearers are at the seaside. I may never see you again on earth. May we all meet in heaven, where thorns will never grow! May we be gathered by the angels in that day when the Lord shall say, "Gather the wheat into My barn"! Amen. So let it be.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 13:1-23.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK—916, 643, 30.

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